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EDITORIAL

Assistive technology requires an intersectoral approach

Assistive technology, as defined by the World Health Organization, is comprised of assistive products and the policies, systems, and services required to deliver them (World Health Organization, 2022). In supporting the various ways people engage in their lives, assistive technologies can be found across all facets of life – from supporting childhood development, to education, work, and home life. Assistive technologies have been demonstrated to be central to the realization of rights of persons with disabilities (Smith et al., 2022), and even critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (Tebbutt et al., 2016).

Why is it then, that the provision of assistive technology is often perceived as the sole responsibility of a single government ministry or agency? Where assistive technology responsibility is shared across agencies – for example when assistive technologies are provided by ministries of Health, Education, and Labour, or Social Protection, they are often provided in silos, where one system does not collaborate with, or even speak to the other. For example, there are countless stories of children receiving assistive products to achieve school outcomes, which are not transferable to the home environment, or receiving products from one system until the age of 18, only to fall off the proverbial cliff and have to access an entirely different system as an adult – often with wait lists and new assessments required (Houchins, 2001). Poorly coordinated systems where different organizations and agencies provide different products for different settings results in confusion and frustration for people trying to access assistive technologies, increased costs, and inequitable access (Durocher et al., 2017).

Arguably, the integrated provision of assistive technology across a range of ministries, agencies, and programs would not only better serve the people who need assistive technology for participation in their daily lives, it would also be more cost effective for governments who are providing the services as it would result in less duplication of efforts, and a more coordinated approach. An intersectoral approach is critical to achieving the best outcomes – both for people and for governments.

A recent umbrella review of intersectoral approaches to health policies may hold keys to understanding the barriers and facilitators to intersectoral assistive technology policy (Amri et al., 2022). Assistive technology policies face similar barriers: identifying shared visions, establishing funding, appropriate leadership, accountability and ownership, and


the availability of data for policy development (Amri et al., 2022). However, the review also identifies key facilitators, which assistive technology researchers and policy makers should keep in view: ensuring avenues for communication and liaison, establishing good political leadership, identifying shared visions and common goals, providing the necessary education and access to information, and identifying appropriate avenues for funding (Amri et al., 2022).

Assistive technology, by nature of being integral to all aspects of life, is necessarily cross-cutting. It requires a different approach to “the way it’s always been done.” It requires creatively exploring how different systems can work together to ensure the realization of rights for all people. The Assistive Technology Journal invites submissions to our Policy section describing policies and strategies which take an intersectoral and collaborative approach to assistive technology leadership.

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